

## The Battle of Balaklava : “A Brief History of 25th October 1854”

By Dr Douglas J Austin      01      [ TWC 22(3) p36 2004 ]

[ A supplement to Major Colin Robins’ valuable compilation of timings,  
published in “*The War Correspondent*”, 22(2), July, 2004, p. 17). ]

On the field of battle, the historian would wish for the god-like and dispassionate “pure observer” who witnesses, understands and records everything perfectly. Soldiers, of all ranks, may not be well placed to recognise key events and to record them as they occur, casting no slight on the many fine accounts we have from serving soldiers. There was, however, a new class of professional recorders in the Crimean War - the war correspondents - whose problems and achievements (then and now) are well described in Philip Knightley’s excellent book [1].

William Howard Russell (Special Correspondent of “*The Times*” in the Crimea) was, allegedly, “the first and greatest” of the war correspondents, but many good men were present, including Thomas Chenery (Special Correspondent of “*The Times*” at Constantinople), who awoke the British public to the appalling problems at the Barrack Hospital, Edwin Lawrence Godkin of the “*London Daily News*” and Nicholas Augustus Woods, who represented the “*Morning Herald*” in the Crimea (until July, 1855) and described the whole war in an excellent book [2].

Russell had a difficult introduction to his work at the Alma on September 20th, 1854, but on the day of Balaklava, with no military duties to perform and with freedom of movement, he positioned himself well to observe the British and French commanders and troops in action. His first description of the Battle of Balaklava was written on the 26th of October and was published in “*The Times*” on 14th November [3] (in the listing below, I refer to that publication as [T]). He supplemented this with his highly interesting book “*The Great War with Russia*” [4] (drawn from his original notes and despatches) which appeared in 1895. I refer to pages in that book as [GWR, p. xxx]. His edited despatches were published by Nicolas Bentley in 1966 [5].

As a starting point for the day, the time of sunrise for 25th October, 1854 can be calculated from the location of Balaklava (44 30 55 N : 33 36 18 E) using the Internet-based US Naval Observatory Data Service [6]. This gives the following results (which were confirmed using J. J. Lammi’s system [7]):-

U.S. Naval Observatory Astronomical Applications Department Sun Data for One Day:  
The following information is provided for Balaklava, Crimea (longitude E33.6, latitude N44.5):

Wednesday 25 October 1854	Universal Time + 3h
Begin civil twilight	06:43
Sunrise	07:13
Sun transit	12:30
Sunset	17:46
End civil twilight	18:16

[Civil Twilight begins when the Sun is 6 degrees below the horizon, which is clearly defined, and Sunrise occurs when the Sun is 0.83 degrees below the horizon.]

These calculations are based on the assumption that the appropriate time-zone is indeed GMT + 3 hours (as it now is for Moscow, St. Petersburg and Volgograd). Russell himself provided

strong evidence for that when he wrote [GWR, p. 165] “**The day was over early too - an hour after noon - and there were five good hours of daylight left.**”. Because Russell also wrote “the watch was, I believe, a little slow” [GWR, p. 169], his records are not absolute, but they certainly provide good relative timings. Evidence from Mark Conrad’s outstanding collection of Russian texts [8] suggests that both the Allied and Russian “Crimea clock-times” equate with GMT + 3 hours. Here are the time-related extracts from [T] and [GWR], rearranged in chronological order and interlaced with Major Robins’ timings (shown in italics). Note: In his reports, Russell sometimes numbered redoubts 1 to 4 from West to East, whereas at the time they were numbered from East to West. To avoid confusion, corrected redoubt numbers (with No. 1 at Canrobert’s Hill) are substituted in Russell’s text.

#### THE CAVALRY ACTION AT BALAKLAVA      October 25th, 1854

0500 Cavalry Division stands-to, as normal [DJA : RUSSIANS START MOVING]

0530 Lucan and party ride towards Redoubt 1

0600 Russians occupy Kamara Heights with large force incl 30 guns. Begin attack on Redoubt 1. Turks fire borrowed guns. Russians reply. Lucan sees the warning signal. British camp hear the guns.

[ According to Woods ([2], Vol. II, p.59), “The 25th was a regular October morning, the mists hung cold and thick over the plain and valleys of Balaklava, concealing every distant object from view”.]

[GWR, p. 136] “It was certainly “**before sunrise**” when Lord Lucan...was startled by the Turks in the redoubts opening fire.”

[GWR, p. 134] “The advance of the Russians was detected **as soon as it was daylight.**”

0630 W Bty RA deploy west of Redoubt 3. British cavalry move forward. Raglan is told.

0640 I Tp RHA arrive on Causeway Heights and W Bty move to make room for them.

0715 Raglan arrives at his viewpoint. Redoubt 1 falls. I and W are out-gunned and withdraw.

[T] “...**At half-past 7 o'clock this morning** an orderly came galloping in to the head-quarters camp from Balaklava, with the news that at dawn a strong corps of Russian horse, supported by guns and battalions of infantry, had marched into the valley and had already nearly dispossessed the Turks of the redoubt No. 1 (that on Canrobert's Hill, which is furthest from our lines), and that they were opening fire on the redoubts Nos. 2, 3, and 4, which would speedily be in their hands unless the Turks offered a stouter resistance than they had done already...”

[GWR, p. 133] “**It must have been soon after half-past seven o'clock that morning** when I began the washing and booting operations which preceded the rough but not always ready breakfast. **It was nearly half an hour later, perhaps, when B. came into the tent with the news that the Russians were advancing.** In my letter it is stated that the news came to Headquarters at 7.30.”

0730 Redoubts 2,3 and 4 fall as Raglan watches. ADCs despatched with orders to 1 and 4 Divs. C Tp RHA in camp head for action. Cardigan meets I Tp withdrawing.

0740 ADC arrives at 4 Div - Cathcart won 7 move.

0800 1 Div begin to move, via Col.

Raglan issues “First Order to the Cavalry”.

[T] “...**Soon after 8** Lord Raglan and his staff turned out and cantered towards the rear of our position...”

[GWR, p. 137] “...**soon after eight o'clock** reinforcements were ordered down from camp to defend Balaclava.”

[GWR, p. 134] “A quiet canter would have taken one from Headquarters to the edge of the plateau in twenty minutes. But **it was certainly eight o'clock, if not later**, before the Commander-in-Chief with his Staff.. appeared at the Ridge. They arrived just in time to see the Russians in possession of the Redoubt Canrobert on which their flag was hoisted. They saw the end of the attack on the Turks of which I witnessed the development, if not the beginning. ”

[T] “...**Just as I came up** the Russians had carried No. 1 redoubt, the farthest and most elevated of all, and their horsemen were chasing the Turks across the interval which lay between it and redoubt No.2...”

0820 Lucan receives “First Order to the Cavalry ”

0830 4 Div begins to move, via Col.

Raglan issues “Second Order to the Cavalry”.

[GWR, p. 162] “...there was an interval between the first and the second order of **more than half an hour.**”

[GWR, p. 163] “The second order was sent to Lord Lucan **some thirty or thirty-five minutes after** the first order.”

0845 Lucan receives “Second Order to the Cavalry 8 sqns of Hy Cav Bde detached and move off. Rihov’s force of Russian cavalry (20 sqns + 3 sotnias) arrive in North Valley.

0855 Rihov's force near crest of Causeway Hts.

0905 4 Russian sqns approach 93rd and are repulsed by volleys and artillery.

0910 16 Russian sqns pass the Hy Bde and are charged. Few cas on both sides. Withdrawing they are hit by shot from I and W Btys. Russians withdraw to East, then north into North valley in confusion.

[T] “...This Russian horse **in less than five minutes** after it met our dragoons was flying with all its speed before a force certainly not half its strength...”

0915 Raglan elated at success of Hy Bde.

0930 Raglan issues "Third Order to the Cavalry”.

0950 Lucan receives “Third Order to the Cavalry”.

1000 I Div reach South valley and march towards Kadikoi.

[T] “...**At 10 o'clock** the Guards and Highlanders of the First Division were seen moving towards the plains from their camp. The Duke of Cambridge came up to Lord Raglan for orders and his Lordship, ready to give the honour of the day to Sir Colin Campbell, who commands at Balaklava, told His Royal Highness to place himself under the direction of the Brigadier.”

[GWR, p. 137] “**It must have been ten o'clock, or two hours**, before the Guards and the 4th Division appeared.”

1020 4 Div reach South valley.

1030 4 Div's orders changed to recapture Redoubts and turn towards Causeway Hts.

[T] "...At **10.40** the Fourth Division also took up their position in advance of Balaklava..."

[T] "...General Canrobert, attended by his staff, and Brigadier-General Rose, rode up to Lord Raglan, and the staffs of the two armies mingled together in praise of the magnificent charge of our cavalry, while the chiefs apart conversed over the operations of the day, which promised to be one of battle..."

1055 Raglan issues "Fourth Order to the Cavalry" and Nolan rides off with it.

[T] "...At **10.55** a body of cavalry, the Chasseurs d'Afrique, passed down to the plain and were loudly cheered by our men. They took up ground in advance of the ridges on our left..."

1100 Lucan receives "Fourth Order to the Cavalry".

[T] "...At **11 a.m** the Russians, feeling alarmed at our steady advance and at the symptoms of our intention to turn or cut off their right, retired from No. 4 redoubt, which was taken possession of by the allies."

1110 Lt Bde move off towards the Don Cossack guns, some 1¼ miles off.

[T] "...At 11.10 our Light Cavalry Brigade rushed to the front. They numbered...607 sabres..."

[T] "...At 11.15 they [Russians] abandoned the redoubt No. 3, blowing up the magazine..."

1130 Remains of Lt Bde return.

[T] "...At **11.35** not a British soldier, except the dead and dying, was left in front of these bloody Muscovite guns."

[GWR, p. 169] "...of the return of the survivors, **11.35 to 11.45**;"

[T] "...as we still continued to advance, they [Russians] blew up and abandoned [Redoubt] No. 2 at 11.45..."

[GWR, p. 169] "...of the Russian retrograde movement, **11.45**;"

[T] "...At **11.48** the Russian line of infantry all began to retire slowly, and a strong portion of it crept up the hills behind the 1st redoubt, which still belongs to them, in the hope that we would attack them in that position..."

[T] "...At **12 o'clock** the greater portion of the French and British moved on more rapidly, and an accession to the strength of our artillery was made by two French batteries, who pushed on towards the front of our left in support of their cavalry. The First Division remained still in line along the route to Balaklava."

[GWR, p. 169] "...of the first general advance of the Allies towards the redoubts at **12 o'clock**, and again at **12.40**:"

[T] “...From **12 to 12.15** not a shot was fired on either side, but the Russians gathered up their forces towards the heights over the gorge, and, still keeping their cavalry on the plain, manoeuvred in front on our right...”

[T] “...The cannonade, which began again at **12.15** and was continued with little effect, ceased altogether at **1.15** and the two armies retained their respective positions.”

[GWR, p. 169] “...and of the cessation of the cannonade between the Armies, which **began at 12.15, at 1.15**. The watch was, I believe, **a little slow**.”

[T] “...**At 12.28** the whole of the allies again got into motion towards the enemy, with the exception of the First Division, which moved en echelon towards the opposite hills, keeping their right wing well before Balaklava.”

[T] “...**At 12.40** Captain Calthorpe was sent by Lord Raglan with orders to the troops, which seemed to have the effect of altering the disposition of our front, for the French **at 1 p.m.** showed still further up on our left. When we got to the ridges they took possession of redoubts Nos. 4, 3, and 2. But the Russians evidently intended to keep No. 1, and to draw us after them if possible into the gorge where they had retired their guns...”

[GWR, p. 165] “The day was over early too - **an hour after noon - and there were five good hours of daylight left**.”

[T] “...Lord Raglan continued on the hill-side all day, watching the enemy.”

[T] “...**About 4 o'clock**, Sir Colin Campbell and Sir G. Cathcart and Lord Cardigan had interviews with Lord Raglan, who evidently listened to their recitals with great interest. General Bosquet joined General Canrobert, and there was a long conversation between the French and English Generals, after which all moved down to the valley together, and examined the enemy's position.”

[T] “...With **the last gleam of day** we could see the sheen of the enemy's lances in their old position in the valley, and their infantry gradually crowned the heights on their left and occupied the road to the village which beyond Balaklava to the southward. Our Guards were moving back, as I passed them, and the tired troops, French and English, were being replaced by a strong French division, which was marched down to the valley **at 5 o'clock**. All our operations in the trenches were lost sight of in the interest of this melancholy day, in which our Light Brigade was annihilated by their own rashness, and by the brutality of a ferocious enemy...”

[T] “...**It was dark** ere Lord Raglan returned to his quarters.”

[T] “...**THE SORTIE OF THE GARRISON.**                      October 26.

“...Last night when our guns were taken into Sebastopol, there was great joy throughout the city, and it was announced that the Russians had gained a great victory. A salvo of artillery was fired, and **at 9 o'clock p.m.** a tremendous cannonade was opened against all our lines by the enemy. It did no injury.”

#### References:-

1) Philip Knightley, “The First Casualty”, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York and London, 1975.

- 2) Nicholas Augustus Woods, "The Past Campaign: A Sketch of the War in the East", Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1855.
- 3) William Howard Russell's despatch to "The Times", printed on Tuesday, Nov 14, 1854 (pg.7.; Issue 21898) = [T].
- 4) William Howard Russell, LL.D. "The Great War with Russia", George Routledge & Sons, London, 1895 = [GWR].
- 5) Nicolas Bentley (ed.), "Russell's Despatches from the Crimea 1854-1856, Andre Deutsch, London, 1966.
- 6) US Naval Observatory Data Service: [http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/RS\\_OneDay.html](http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/RS_OneDay.html).
- 7) J. J. Lammi's Online-Photoperiod Calculator: <http://www.sci.fi/~benefon/sun/ph3>.
- 8) Mark Conrad's Home Page - Russian Military History: <http://home.comcast.net/~markconrad/>.